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Minding *the* Animal Psyche

The Art of Cultural Brokerage: Recreating Elephant-Human Relationship and Community

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The zoo elephants were taught to never, ever touch the bullhook, the razor-sharp, pointed steel prod used to control elephants in captivity. One day the elephant Amy knocked the bullhook out of a keeper's hand and it flew across the yard. The keeper ordered Amy to retrieve the bullhook, telling her, "Amy, go pick up the bullhook." Amy hesitated and was ordered to again and again until she finally complied. Once near the bullhook, Amy was ordered to "pick up the bullhook." She didn't. The keeper repeated the order. Finally, Amy picked up a stick. The keeper said, "Amy, no, pick up the bullhook." Amy found and picked up another stick-like item. Again, she was ordered to pick up the bullhook. Finally, Amy picked up the bullhook and then began repeatedly hitting herself on the head with it.

—American zookeeper[1]

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Introduction

There is perhaps no construction in the English language as entrenched as the "and" in "human and nature". With a simple insertion of three letters, the universe splits in two. Law, food, custom, economics, language, social relationships, and the ethics of global culture are all rooted in this divide. This separatist paradigm permeates our relationships with other animals.

But of late, there is a change. Animals no longer seem so different. Even science, that once insisted we humans stood out from the rest of the animal kingdom continuum, has conceded that humans[2] and other animals are comparable in mind. Suddenly, we find ourselves similar to strangers who discover they are related: face to face on equal footing but uncertain how to proceed.[3]

Following the maxim of the medical profession, the logical first step is to "do no harm": discontinue practices that presume human privilege at the expense of other animals. Ethologist Marc Bekoff encourages us to "expand our compassion footprint" and to do unto animal relatives as we would wish to have them do unto us: to stop mass enslavement of animals as commodities for food production and entertainment, for example.[4] Vanquishing this and other cruel practices prevents future abuse, but what about the millions of living casualties? The tiger living in a concrete zoo, the chimpanzee suffering from decades of biomedical testing, the parrot caged in isolation, and domesticated cats and horses whose minds and bodies are shaped to comply with human desires? Even "wild" grizzly bears living in Glacier National Park and elephants in Amboseli, Kenya are not immune. Their fates are determined by what humans wish, not the animals' own decisions, ecology, and psychology.[5] Moving into a compassionate future entails putting the truth we know into reconciling action by helping animals rebuild their lives.

However, righting past wrongs does not happen over night. The scars of trauma run deep: violence leaves a legacy in the minds and bodies of its victims. Further, animals have learned to fear humans even "when they bear gifts."[6] Dame Daphne Sheldrick tells us that elephants and other animals "who once trusted and loved humans may not be quite so accommodating after having been "told" about the experience of others at the hands of humans."[7] If we are to help animal victims recover, then we, as the agents of their distress, must learn how to eschew

Fig. 1: Carol Buckley, co-founder of the preeminent Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, and Tarra share a bond developed over nearly forty years.
Photo courtesy of Carol Buckley

domination and instead interact with other animals under their conditions and terms.[8]

Here we integrate the concepts of trans-species psychology and neuropsychology with elephant experience of trauma and their recovery in sanctuary. We explore an example of relational transformation through a description of elephants and humans living in sanctuary. We describe the re-creation of trans-species community looking through the lens of *culture brokering*. This concept was developed to depict human cross-cultural facilitation, the "act of bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of differing cultural

backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict or producing change"[9]. We extend this idea to psychosocial processes across species where humans function as catalysts, interpreters, and negotiators of relational repair for elephants in recovery from trauma. In sanctuary, elephant caregivers are taught to cultivate the art of trans-species brokering through self-transformation and by redefining the elephant-human relationship from exploitation to service. In so doing, a new, trans-species cultural consciousness begins to evolve.

Elephant Sanctuary

Tragically, human fascination for elephants has led to the brutal process of capture, captivity, and display. As a result, elephants over the world suffer in depauperate captive conditions.

In 1995, I co-founded the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. It has grown to be the largest captive elephant, natural-habitat sanctuary in the world. I have spent thirty-six years living intimately with elephants made captive. For nearly twenty years, I traveled in the U.S. and abroad as an elephant trainer and performed in a number of circuses including Circus Gatini in Quebec, Canada and the Big Apple Circus in New York City. Before founding The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee,[10] I owned and operated Tarra Productions exhibiting, training, and caring for Tarra, a female Asian elephant, who performed for television, motion pictures, and circus shows. Tarra and I have been together since she was one year old. It was the profound relationship that developed with Tarra, and Tarra herself, that catalyzed my own transformation. I quit the entertainment industry to provide a home for elephants.

Typically, elephants come to sanctuary singly from various zoos or circus settings. However, in 2006, precedence was broken when a group of female elephants arrived together at the Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee. The eight "Divas" (as they were soon dubbed in recognition of their celebrity and worldly experiences) came to sanctuary through action brought against the Hawthorn circus corporation by the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Hawthorn's John F. Cuneo, Jr. had been charged with violating the Animal Welfare Act (AWA) for causing physical harm, discomfort, and trauma to elephants. Cuneo pled guilty, was fined

$200,000, and agreed to release of all elephants to USDA-approved facilities. After a protracted two-year delay, Billie, Frieda, Debbie, Queenie, Liz, Minnie, Lottie, and Ronnie were finally released by the Hawthorn Corporation and trucked over twelve hours to the Sanctuary. They arrived two by two, transported in the Sanctuary's custom-designed, climate-controlled elephant trailer. Sadly, Sue, also a Hawthorn elephant, died weeks before she could be moved to the Sanctuary. The tragedy occurred as result of a sedative administered by a Hawthorn veterinarian.

On average, the elephants were captured at the age of two and lived their days and nights in confinement. More recently, zoos obtain elephants through artificial insemination programs and captive breeding.[11] Most of these infants will be prematurely separated from their mothers and in the case of female infants who in the wild would remain with their mother their entire lifetime, will experience relational trauma: unnatural separation from mother and family with no exposure to normative elephant society. All are subjected to the heavy hand of human control. The Divas were prevented from socializing freely. The majority of their time was spent in dark indoor barns with concrete floors and they were chained eighteen or more hours a day except when performing. Their circumstances most closely resembled those of

Fig. 2: Lucy behind bars in the Edmonton Zoo, Canada—captivity is unsuitable for any soul.

Photo courtesy of Zoocheck, Canada

human prisoners who experience group living shackled and separated in individual cells.[12]

Circuses and zoos routinely employ a number of physical and psychological techniques to control and dominate elephants.[13] A description of an American zoo by a former elephant keeper provides a snapshot of typical life for a zoo elephant: "The elephant facility consisted of a cramped indoor exhibit where the elephants were chained front and back nightly. . . Access to the outside yard meant passing through the hippo's night stall across a hallway and involved three manual doors. The outside yard was a four-foot high chain link fence with a pair of leg chains." Further, many zoos are located in climates unsuited for elephants.[14] Over time, combined with the poor living quarters and inadequate social and emotional support, climatic stress leads to health and mental breakdown. In recognition of the duress that captivity causes, a number of zoos have recently moved away from chaining, converting to a more humane system called "protected contact". In this system the ankus (a sharpened metal prod, also called a bullhook) is obsolete. However, circuses and zoos that continue the use of traditional elephant methods (referred to as *free contact*) share a common goal: total control. It is telling that the captive industry refers to systems of elephant care as elephant "management" as opposed to simply elephant "care."[15]

One of the Sanctuary's primary functions is to provide safe structure without human control. Critically, elephants have free will and are able to exercise choice at all times. They may move, think, and be in their bodies without fear. To address deep-seated psychological damage resulting from unnatural confinement and harsh practices of control, the Sanctuary designed its care program to model what psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott calls a *facilitating environment* by creating "a dialogical space of security and creativity."[16] The arriving elephant is treated carefully and tenderly to provide her full flexibility and the capacity to secure for herself a sense of control in new surroundings. For the first time in decades, she encounters an environment that promotes healthy and natural elephant living. While not identical to the jungles of Asia or the savannahs of Africa, the sanctuary habitat provides a variety of lush vegetation and foraging opportunities, with ample nutritious food to chose from, holistic healthcare, a life-long home and social groups, hundreds of acres to explore to help build

physical and mental competence, ponds and creeks to bathe in and play, and barns that provide comfort and shelter. The elephants form and participate in a trans-species community comprised of other elephants, humans, and other Sanctuary residents such as Bella, a dog, with whom Tarra became very close.[17]

> *The fundamental relationships for elephants are those with their true herd members. In captivity we need to define what is meant by "true." Clearly, a true herd member in the wild is a related family member. But the Sanctuary is a captive environment; none of our elephants are related by blood. They are a part of this group that has come into existence only by circumstance: bonds and meaning must be forged and family created. Human caregivers are members of that family. They provide food, water, friendship, access to freedom, and the sense of security that enables the elephants to recover from their past traumas. Critically, elephants and humans form social and emotional bonds. Human caregivers hold a special place in the hearts of these elephants because they are catalysts of elephant psychological transformation from terror to peace. They provide elephants with evidence of hope and life. If we were to believe that caregivers do not enhance the lives of these elephants then one might argue that since Bella is a dog, her relationship with Tarra, the elephant, is somehow insignificant.*

Staff work on elephant time, at the elephant's convenience, not humans', shifting the dynamic from human-controlled management to a life determined by pachyderm residents.[18] In contrast to zoo and circus life, a sanctuary elephant is given total freedom of choice and encouraged to make her own decisions. Human caregivers ask, not demand, an elephant to cooperate with routine procedures such as foot soaks and trunk washes. Gentle communication is accomplished through patience and positive interactions that include the expression of care and pleasure by providing special foods. Elephants are highly intelligent and actively curious. When they feel safe and comfortable in their surroundings they willingly participate in activities that the caregiver seeks to encourage. In this positive, agency-encouraging manner, caregivers find a way that helps an elephant decide to do something in order to accomplish a need, such as receiving medical treatment or even persuading the elephant to move to a different area of the barn or habitat.

Care protocol and relationships between staff and elephant residents are informed by the philosophy of "passive control". Its three key elements are space, time, and non-dominating interactions. The term "control" was retained in recognition that sanctuary is still captivity.[19] Although sanctuary grounds comprise 2,700 acres, they are fenced, and so is, therefore, the mind of a sanctuary elephant. The elephants know that it is still humans, albeit benignly, who control their lives. These elephants will never experience their homelands and relatives again, nor experience the joy of a traditional family and caring for their children and their children's children. Nor will they be able to participate in other experiences that have made elephant society what it is: extensive migrations throughout their home range, interactions with hundreds of other elephants who comprise a vast relational network that once spanned entire continents, in the seemingly endless landscapes they call home.

Unfortunately, traumatic experiences are often deeply enduring despite the rich healing life made available to the elephants. Elephants arriving to sanctuary are encumbered by a variety of debilitating injuries including foot disease, tuberculosis, anorexia, obesity, immunological compromise, and psychological trauma. Clinically, the elephants conform to a diagnosis of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; also referred to as Disorders of Extreme Stress Not Otherwise Specified (DESNOS), the description created to address individuals who experience sustained long-term trauma.[20] Through her extensive work and cumulative studies on concentration camp survivors, veterans, prisoners of war, and victims of domestic violence, psychiatrist Judith Herman found that "the diagnosis of 'post-traumatic stress disorder' . . . does not fit accurately enough . . . survivors of prolonged, repeated trauma." Rather, "the syndrome that follows . . . [such experiences] needs its own name. I propose to call it 'complex post-traumatic stress disorder.'"[21] Severe trauma constitutes a profound assault on the core self that guides beliefs, emotions, and actions and can lead to changes in self-concept.

Similar to concentration camp kapos, prisoners who chose or were chosen to be guards over their fellow inmates as a way to survive, some elephants absorb the violent human culture in which they are immersed. Even after coming to Sanctuary, one of the Divas, Minnie, extended her violent behavior towards humans to other elephants,

although environmental conditions that encouraged abnormal behavior—threats of violence, chains, and abusive control—were absent. Her continued abusive behavior toward Debbie and her dissociative, depressive periods suggest an alteration in identity like that observed among human prisoners who have experienced prolonged abuse. These individuals often exhibit "personality changes, including deformations of relatedness and identity."[22] Human concentration camp survivors had "alterations of personal identity [that] were a constant feature of the survivor syndrome. While the majority of . . . patients complained 'I am now a different person,' the most severely harmed stated simply 'I am not a person.'"[23] Minnie, in effect, was no longer able to be an elephant. She had lost her elephant self.

Another common psychological symptom found in traumatized elephants held in captivity is stereotypy, the patterned dance of head bobbing, trunk and body swaying. Most elephants who come to sanctuary shed this symptom whenever they are out in the habitat. However, for some, this psychological state can be triggered. For instance, an elephant, after roaming through the maze of wooded copses, wading through ponds and creeks, and climbing hills, encounters the sanctuary boundary. Instead of turning and walking in a different direction or choosing to do something else, such as knocking down a tree or talking with another elephant, a few individuals at the sanctuary boundary halt, stand in front of the fence, and begin to sway. Stereotypic dissociations develop as a protective mechanism against unbearable stress and can be related to neuropsychological traumatic reenactments that are "subcortically driven, and unintegrated into more complex adaptive behaviors [reflective of] . . . impairment of higher cortical centers."[24,25] Repetitive anxiety-triggered dissociation causes the release of endorphins that numb psychological pain and panic. In this way, the individual's core self is shielded. At sanctuary, caregivers are instructed to anticipate and divert such behavior from occurring through distracting the elephant away from the fence with succulent food, play, or a warm greeting that seeks to keep her mind and attention present.

The absence of threat and physical and emotional comfort that sanctuary offers provides the essentials for an elephant to begin her recovery. However, severe psychological damage requires others to nurture and rekindle a healthy sense of self. Through the assistance of

Fig. 3: Human control of an elephant, such as Lucy, in captivity exacts a profound psychological price because it seeks to breakdown and control the elephant's core self.

Photo courtesy of Zoocheck, Canada

friends and family, an individual learns to rebuild her identity to transition from human-dominated solitary life to human-supported, but elephant-defined, collective living. Residents co-create their own brand of elephant culture, and it is sanctuary caregivers who are integral in helping facilitate this process.

Culture Brokerage

There are multiple definitions of culture. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz defined it most succinctly as: "an ordered system of meaning and symbols, in terms of which social interaction takes place."[26] Once

regarded as closed systems of meaning, cultures are conceptualized more fluidly, as a set of values, beliefs, customs, interpersonal interactions, and expectations to which a group of individuals ascribe. The term "culture broker" and related concepts such as cultural intermediary and interpreter evolved in situations where members of one human culture encountered those of another. Typically, these concepts have been applied to negotiate differences between modern white European and indigenous peoples.

A culture broker seeks to support the values, beliefs, and customs of a marginalized group, helping the members of it gain access to resources that have been denied and sequestered by the dominating culture. These resources may include jobs, education, health care, funds, and social access. In human contexts, the culture broker commonly holds a position of educator, social worker, or healthcare practitioner. At the interpersonal level, the culture broker functions similarly to a therapist by cultivating the means for the "client" to attain and maintain a self-identity that permits healthful functioning across cultures.

The task is not easy. The culture broker must be able to function biculturally, with the ability to hear and speak in ways that are meaningful to both cultures/species. Knowledge, custom, and language are shared. S/he also must be competent in diverse sub-cultures and be able to navigate intricate nuances and tacit assumptions of two or more cultures that are, almost by definition, at odds. As educator Glen Aikenhead[27] points out, the goals and ethics of culture brokering is somewhat contradictory. Concerning the education of indigenous children in western-dominated culture and schools, he asks: "How does one nurture students' achievement toward formal educational credentials and economic and political independence, while at the same time develop the students' cultural identity as Aboriginals?" and "To what extent, and how, can First Nations students learn non-Aboriginal school subjects such as science without being harmfully assimilated by science's dominant Western culture?" In other words, how can a culture broker both support an individual's sense of self that thrives in one culture while at the same time insisting that the self accommodate norms of a second culture that retains control and power? This question has particular significance for elephant trauma recovery in sanctuary where culture brokerage and elephant psychological repair intersect.

Trauma and the Elephant Self

As the pivotal culture broker/therapist, the sanctuary is charged with the ethically delicate task of helping the resident cultivate a genuine sense of self. This is accomplished by creating conditions that encourage the trauma victim to access internal psychological resources developed before trauma. Renewing social bonds is one critical aspect of recovery essential for self-repair.

While identity is influenced by a number of factors, attachment and developmental contexts are considered primary.[28] Early relationships tune the mind and brain to be able to interact successfully with the biophysical and social environment. The growing mind is incredibly plastic and receptive to the sounds, touch, smell, emotions, and voice of those who care for the infant. Depending on who and how he/she was raised, an individual's sense of self may reflect a range of cultural orientations. For example, in contrast to *individualistic, independent* societies that earmark modern, western society, many indigenous cultures are referred to as *collective, interdependent* social systems.[29] Broadly speaking, self-identity in collectively-based cultures is closely linked with the group.

Pre-trauma self-development and post-trauma self-repair are related. This is vividly illustrated in cases of cross-fostered individuals, those who are born to one species/culture and reared by another. Studies show that trauma recovery is facilitated when recovery contexts reflect developmental contexts where attachment relationships have been strong, nurturing, and healthy.[30] For wildlife, this means species-normative rearing in the wild. Sanctuary elephants have had little exposure to normative elephant society. However, because the Tennessee Sanctuary elephants spent at least their first and second years in free-ranging elephant society, they likely acquired an identity with their species/culture of origin and were therefore able to carry some elephant values and understanding into captive life.

Infant pachyderms in free-ranging, traditional elephant society are raised by a mother and allomothers: a constellation of aunts and siblings with whom the young female elephant remains for the entirety of her life. Young male elephants stay within the natal family until approximately ten years of age before moving to an all bull group for tutoring during a second phase of socialization. Viewed through the

lens of transcultural neuropsychology, the elephant mind is profoundly influenced by multiple family members and the consciousness of the group.

The idea that the mind is something more than personal is common to many schools of psychology beginning with depth psychology's model of the collective unconscious to more recent concepts such as the "groupmind" where an individual is seen as a "vessel through which unconscious group life can be expressed and understood. . . [and where] groups are seen as living systems and the individuals in the group are subsystems of which the group is comprised."[31] When a person speaks he/she does so not only for themselves but also for the unconscious sentiment of the group. Recovery of an elephant psyche involves revitalization of "the supra-individual nature" of the self that represents aspects of the group's unconscious mind.[32] Individual healing is effected in the plural. But who is the captive elephants' community?

One might assume that the elephants in sanctuary belong to the same culture, or at most two cultures, given that the sanctuary provides homes for both African and Asian species. However, the elephants' "ordered system of meaning and symbols. . . in. . . which social interaction[s] take place"[33] was not shaped by free-ranging elephant society alone, but by human circus and zoo culture. Their systems of customs, interpersonal interactions, and expectations were human dominated, forcibly imposed, in relative isolation from or sporadic contact with other elephants. Prior to living at the Sanctuary, the Divas sometimes shared physical space, yet they were forbidden to interact with each other naturally. A young mind subjected to harsh deprivation and the constant threat of harm or death has few defenses. As Minnie's torment painfully illustrates, circus and zoo elephant minds were subjected to experiences of traumatic survival; by force of circumstance, their systems of meaning became distorted by an environment defined by violence. Recovery, by necessity, involves the complex negotiation between a revitalized elephant self, the experiences of trauma, and socialization with other elephants and human caregivers.

Elephant Cultural Brokerage

The elephant survivor in recovery is challenged to create a post-trauma self and learn new social behavior that is not rooted in abuse

and mistrust. The sanctuary caregiver helps an individual broker past (pre-trauma self, traumatized self) and present (post-trauma self). The therapeutic alliance develops slowly and evolves over time where the human caregiver becomes part of the elephant groups as healer, sister, and friend. Relational trauma from human betrayal and violence can only be mended with relational repair: the development of deep trust, love, and care between an elephant and human caregiver. The profound bond between human and elephant that matures over time can be as important as those between elephants and must be considered as sacred. Unwilling breaking of such a bond violates elephant culture and can cause a re-traumatization.

Elephants truly see beyond the exterior to the heart and soul.

As Bunny's story illustrates, the elephants and I work with each other as co-facilitators in trans-species community. After living more than forty years in an Indiana zoo, Bunny was overweight, out of shape, and had to retrain her muscles to be able to walk with any surety in the sanctuary habitat. One evening, she was coming back to the barn but she could not figure out how to cross a dry creek. She stopped, then took a step forward at the edge of a creek bed where the embankment dropped off. She stepped as if expecting the ground to be directly under foot but it was not. She collapsed onto her elbows and froze in place, scared to death. I coaxed her to get up to no avail, she appeared to be in shock, not physically injured but emotionally traumatized. I looked up and saw Barbara, another elephant, watching from the barn door several hundred yards away. Without hesitation or verbal encouragement from me, Barbara came over to us. With a gentle trunk touch on the side of Bunny's face, Barbara was able to effortlessly and instantly encourage Bunny to stand up and follow her across the creek. I stood frozen in awe as they left for the barn, Barbara looked over her shoulder into my eyes. We shared a moment of joyful sisterhood, reveling in Bunny's triumph.

Jezewski[34] identifies twelve attributes characteristic of culture brokers and their functions. For example, a cultural broker is often called upon to intervene when tension develops that may lead to conflict. This is the role that was demanded in the early days of the Divas' arrival to sanctuary.

At 11,000 pounds, Minnie is the largest elephant at the Sanctuary. She would physically intimidate other elephants as a means to get her needs

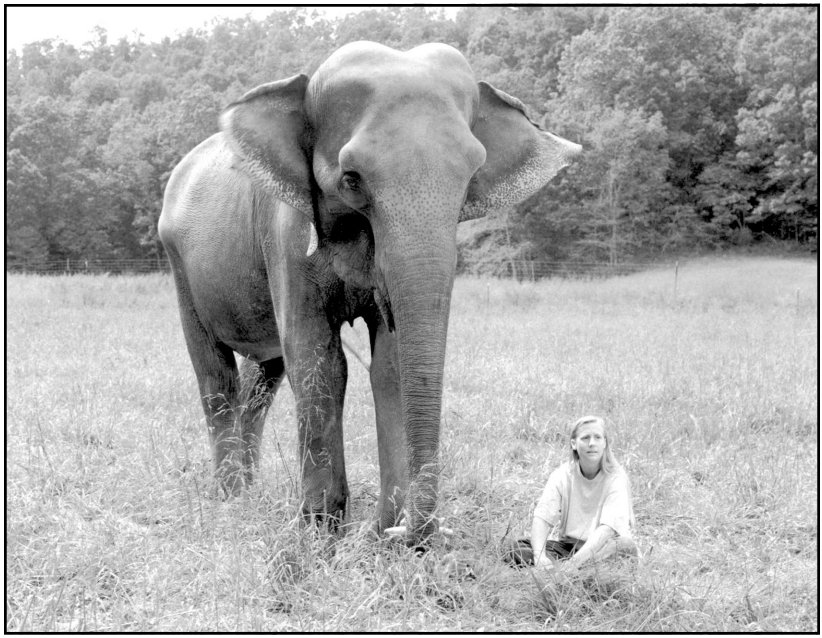

Fig. 4: Barbara and Carol Buckley, friends and sisters in sanctuary.
Photo courtesy of Carol Buckley

met. Even though she has over 200 acres to roam and explore, trees to wrestle and topple, and ponds in which to play, Minnie exhibits periods of anxiety and begins to search out another elephant literally to push around. Initially, when I saw Minnie begin to corral another elephant, I would try to distract her with positive gestures such as giving her food or by persuading her to play with a ball or game. But these efforts merely exacerbated the situation. The more I sought to distract her, the more focused her aggressive attention on the other elephants got. I realized that I needed to be more of an observer, to watch how the tension began and what was happening environmentally that set up this situation. It was not possible to stop Minnie or other conflicts once they started, but it was possible to adjust the context so that these negative interactions did not occur or, if they did, were much more attenuated.

Many of Minnie's aggressive acts happened about one half hour before evening feeding. Typically, we brought hay and fruits to the elephants around 5:30 p.m., and it was at about 5:10 p.m. that Minnie showed signs of agitation, anxiety, and searched for someone to "pick on". When I decided

to make the evening feeding times random, Minnie's conflicts decreased significantly. However, there came a time when resolution of interpersonal tensions demanded something more than perceptual readjustment.

Certain aspects of cultures, like the biophysical terrains in which they evolve, have rigid boundaries that do not permit a mixing of customs or resolution of conflict by compromise. These boundaries support psychological identity and bring coherence. However, they can also be a source of conflict when they are not consonant with those of another community. Culture brokers are therefore called upon to innovate when traditions are inflexible.[35]

Many months were spent carefully watching social and psychological patterns of individuals as they interacted with each other. Each Diva has a distinct personality and set of complexes with which she struggles on her path of recovery. Initially, the eight shared common ground. But in addition to Minnie's aggression, Billie also showed a one-time occurrence of belligerence toward a ertain member of the group. Born in 1953, Billie is the eldest, but she is not a natural matriarch like Lottie. Billie became aggressive to Lottie and head-butted her. Lottie did not retaliate, but eventually her friends, Minnie and Debbie, reprimanded Billie and despite her chronological seniority, Billie was eventually driven from group, initially spending time alone and later forming strong bonds with Liz and Frieda.

There were other internal altercations. Minnie wanted to be with Debbie, but Debbie did not. This difference in opinion led to fighting with each other, finally involving Ronnie. Finally, the conflict was so significant that Minnie's aggression threatened to injure Ronnie, which prompted me to physically split the Divas into three groups, each having their own physical area: Minnie, Lottie, and Queenie together, Debbie and Ronnie in a second group, and Liz, Frieda, and Billie in a third. After many months of networking between the sub-groups, supporting each sub-group's traditions and values, and trying to cultivate relationships, I was able to translate their individual and collective psychological needs into the design of their care and habitat. Although separated, they are able to interact across fences and talk with each other. Critically, while my relationship with each is unique, they all trust my role as intermediary and facilitator. The rewards of this work are immeasurable, both in terms of the elephant's recovery to life and their profound appreciation for my help.

The managing director of the Sanctuary describes this deep love and trust:

> I was distracted from my work in the quarantine barn office by a loud trumpeting, and jumped up just in time to see Minnie tearing through the creek. . . I admired how gracefully Minnie moved, her upper body held high while her legs raced her across the ground. Her best friend, Lottie, had summoned her, and Minnie as usual wasted no time in joining her. Soon the valley was filled with trumpets, Queenie-squeaks and a magnificent low rumbling that I have come to learn may mean the elephants are pleased to see someone. Minnie, Lottie, and Queenie were soon jostling for a prime viewing spot along the fence line, of what I wondered. The rumbling and trumpets grew louder, and then I saw what their focus was; it was Carol, who had been working at the keeper's house, coming out to greet them. These three magnificent elephants were showing and receiving love from their caregiver, after lifetimes filled with pain and disrespect. Amazingly resilient, they are able to open their hearts and we are blessed to be in their presence.[36]

Another important role of the culture broker is to "stand guard over critical junctures in the context of interactions," to provide vulnerable individuals with the security of a third party "container" who can oversee and guarantee safety. This requires that the brokering human be trusted. One of the most important challenges an elephant faces when she comes to sanctuary is to establish a relationship with her human caregivers. To grasp the enormity of this task, it is necessary to understand the roles humans play in the minds and lives of elephants made captive.

In the circus culture, where the Divas spent decades of their lives, humans have very specific roles. There are generally three categories: trainers, grooms, and showgirls. The trainer is the most powerful; he dominates the elephant using bullhooks and other instruments. The elephant must comply and obey the trainer or severe punishments follows. The groom is much lower in the circus hierarchy. S/he cleans floors, feeds the elephants, and moves elephants from chain to chain. Grooms are generally shown limited respect by the trainers and the elephants know this. Minnie was known in the circus as a "slapper": an elephant who tries to hit the groom with her trunk or leg. Some

Fig. 5: A lifetime of suffering: Elephants in annual Washington, D.C. parade wearing green hats to celebrate St Patrick's Day.

Photo courtesy of Amy Mayers

trainers actually encourage this behavior to bolster their position of power. The showgirl has little contact with the elephants except in rehearsals and during the circus performance when she rides atop the elephant's back or head. Understandably, many entertainers who are props on the elephants are intimidated by the elephants sheer size and use food to "bribe" and placate the elephant.

When the Divas came to sanctuary, they found that I did not fit any of these categories. On one hand, I fulfilled the trainer's role because of my expertise and confidence, but I did not tell them what to do nor discipline or punish them for any action. On the other hand, I contradicted this image because I performed groom chores. Minnie was aware of this and showed me no respect; indeed, she went out of her way to show her disrespect. Minnie believed that I had no right to approach her in a personal manner. In her eyes, I was breaking the rules of conduct by mixing trainer and groom behaviors. The other elephants were much less resistant and became amenable to a human who had a diversity of behaviors and roles. In a sense, they trusted me because of these contradictions: I did not use force or try in any way to dominate, and I encouraged them to make their own decisions, gave them a variety of foods to choose from, and did not prevent them from coming or

going to the barn and around the grounds. Over time, as our interactions together were shown to be consistently positive and non-threatening, trust towards me grew. It may be that the ambiguity[37] and multiplicity of my role encourages the elephants to focus on me as a person, not my status or species.

Subsequently, when a situation arose that caused anxiety or possible friction, I was sufficiently trusted to be permitted to help work things out between the elephants. For instance, when I saw that there was relational strain, I would open a gate to let Ronnie and Debbie move through to a different area leaving the others behind. They would still be able to interact with the others, but with safety. In this way, the elephants were able to work things out relationally amongst themselves in a secure and safe environment. When things calmed down. I would then open the gate to let them freely comingle. This type of brokering helped them move forward emotionally. It was my goal not to force them to be a certain way, but to provide them with the psychological, emotional, social, and physical resources to recover their own "culturally distinctive modes of communication, thought, and life styles."[38] After these many months, I have been accepted as one of the group. My knowledge and beliefs are respected as I respect those of each elephant and the group as a whole and we learn from each other. I must learn to identify the fears of each elephant and help her through every single step of the way. It is a marvel to be there when she makes a breakthrough and I stand with her as part of the family with the other elephants.

This process of mutual learning and helping is illustrated in the relationship with Sissy and Winkie.

Sissy was born in 1968 and captured from the wild in Thailand at one year of age. The City of El Paso, Texas, decided to send her to Sanctuary after she was severely beaten by zoo staff. She had suffered a series of prior traumas including being submerged in a 1981 flood that hit Gainesville, Texas, where she was kept at the Frank Buck Zoo. She survived by holding her trunk up and out of the water for three days. Unlike other elephants who cavort and splash joyfully in the pond and creek, Sissy was understandably terrified of water. She would panic when it began to rain and refuse to go near the creek.

In the fourth month after her arrival, I was out walking with her when we came across a shallow patch of standing water. I spoke softly to her, encouraging and telling her that I was right with her and would we could

cross the water together. The conflictive emotions showed on Sissy's face as she obviously tried to build up confidence to try—and she finally succeeded. When we had crossed through the water, she let out a blast of a trumpet; she had actually been holding her breath. Her accomplishment, working through this fear, resulted in a display of great joy as she spun around, chirped, and ever so gently touched me with her trunk. Soon afterwards, she became mentor and coach. A few months later, Winkie, another Asian elephant with a traumatic history, was too fearful to leave the barn. Sissy stepped in and in a fashion similar to the coaching I had performed with her, she helped Winkie, two years her senior, overcome her fear and walk out of the barn.[44]

Discussion

This brief excursion into the experience of elephants and humans in sanctuary provides one example of trans-species culture brokering and the transformation of animal-human relationships. Sanctuary residents and caregivers learn to share knowledge, custom, and language and to move fluidly through a mosaic of multiple sub-cultures—human, elephant-human, and elephants, each having their own customs and social expectations.

The culture broker also helps an elephant learn how to safely enter in relationships with other elephants in community. Both species work together to "create safety for each other as they re-build community, and what emerges is deepening self-knowledge not just of the individual but of the group."[39] Psychosocial integration creates a new trans-species culture. Caregivers function as "brokers" who help elephants transition from a past culture of human domination to one of elephant agency. Similar to human-human brokering, sanctuary provides marginalized individuals access to external resources formerly denied. Instead of jobs, education, and funds, elephant sanctuary provides nutritious food, expansive terrain, water, trees, and socialization with others. However, it does something more.

Critically, through aiding trauma recovery, the sanctuary *vas* helps elephants gain access to their *internal* resources: psychological and physical competence, self-repair and regeneration, and the capacity to bond socially. This was illustrated dramatically with Minnie, whose core elephant self was broken by abuse. By brokering physical and social space with Minnie, sanctuary provided her with the means to begin healing deep psychological wounds. Today, she is on the path to

Fig. 6: Carol and her elephant sisters; the evolution of trans-species community and consciousness.

Photo courtesy of Carol Buckley

rebuilding an identity of someone other than the person who absorbed the identity of her abusers.[40]

Bicultural brokering requires competence in both cultures, in this case, human and elephant. Effective sanctuary facilitators must be able to function on common ground psychologically and linguistically to gain trust and insights necessary for psychological healing and trans-species negotiation. For this reason, elephant psychological transformation is contingent on human psychological transformation. The trans-species worker must constantly be mindful and reflective of her/his projections. While sharing cultures and values, we must be respectful of difference. Even while interactions, such as Minnie and Debbie's conflict, can be very painful to watch, our role is to facilitate their process and maintain their safety, witness, not judge. It is also crucial that the caregiver believes that elephants possess the ability and right to make decisions that concern their wellbeing. Elephants are able to discern the difference. If the caregiver does not believe in elephant agency, the elephant continues to be objectified and remains psychologically dominated and captive.

Unlike western science's objectivity, witnessing does not subordinate psychological reality to collectively based facts. Witnessing is not suspicious of personal experience and does not automatically question and evaluate such experience relative to a collective standard. It involves "trust-based" inquiry that relies on the significance of the experiencer and the observer alone. Further, witnessing does not ask the individual to conform to a particular mode of expression; full perceptual and somatic experience beyond the convention of scientific observation is considered valid. Changing human attitude from authority to partnering deconstructs animal objectification and invites a "participatory mode of consciousness which 'is the awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known.'"[41] Above all, we must respect the profound lasting relationships that form the psychological matrix of wellbeing: elephant-elephant, elephant-human, elephant-dog. In so doing, we contribute to a common ground of consciousness, a new compassionate ethic that knows no species bounds.

NOTES

1. American zookeeper, recounted to Catherine Doyle, personal communication, February 26, 2010.

2. The use of the term "human" here generally refers to members of modern, westernized cultures.

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14. American zookeeper, recounted to Catherine Doyle, personal communication, February 26, 2010.

15. Randy Malamud, this volume; Lori Marino, G.A. Bradshaw, Randy Malamud, "Captivity Industry: The reality of zoos and aquariums", *Best Friends Magazine*, March/April, CA.; G.A. Bradshaw, "Inside looking out: neurobiological compromise effects in elephants in captivity"; D.L. Forthman *et al., Elephant in the Room,* pp. 55-68; G.A. Bradshaw, "Elephants in captivity: analysis of practice, policy, and the future", *Society & Animals* 1-48, 2007.

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17. Steve Hartman, "On Elephant Sanctuary, Unlikely Friends: Steve Hartman Looks At What Difference A Couple Of Tons Makes—Or Doesn't—For Two Old Friends," CBS Evening News. January 2, 2009; http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2009/01/02/assignment_america/main4696340.shtml, retrieved March 16, 2010.

18. G.A. Bradshaw, *Elephants on the Edge: What Animals Teach Us About Humanity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

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